

Who Preyed Upon Fashionable New York Society

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at the game of small talk—and she could hold her own even with the witty Sam Wilson. The more stolid Vanderbilt was no match for her at all.

Much to my concern I began to notice a rivalry between Mr. Wilson and Mathews for her favor. I was astonished at this manifestation. I tried my best to steer her away from a dangerous course, but failed. She simply was following my instructions—trying to impress these good fellows with her charm; trying to show them that, although she was a princess, she was a worthy one and a good fellow as well, but she succeeded too well.

Suddenly there was a commotion. Harsh words passed between Wilson, the imperturbable, and Mathews, the dignified. Both had been trying to monopolize her, and their purposes crossed. Soon they were making violent love to her. The two men were the best of friends—cronies for years—but that was forgotten for the moment under the siren spell of this young woman. Mathews, reaching across the table for the bottle out of which we had just poured Scotch whiskey, caught it by the neck, and before we could prevent him had broken it over his friend's head.

One may imagine the sensation that ensued. I hastily escorted Mrs. Hayne from the scene, while attendants scurried around for a doctor. Wilson was carried to a neighboring drug store, where he was treated and was then taken home. Mathews was led into the club house, soothed and escorted to his club. The next day both Mathews and Wilson were sorry. None was so regretful as Mrs. Hayne herself. She communicated with both men, and was so tactful in her regrets that both apologized to her for the unfortunate occurrence and became her fast friends. The incident was gossiped about all over town, however, and suddenly there was a great, absorbing interest in this mysterious princess from Austria.

Invitations began to pour in upon Mrs. Hayne for teas, dances and receptions. Occasionally some parvenu wrote her, using the title I had supplied—Princess Alma. All of these Alma returned unceremoniously. She never used her title openly. She objected every time anyone addressed her with it. She carried on the subterfuge that of course I cannot call myself a princess until the Emperor has given me permission. It was a very pretty way of exciting interest and sympathy.

Alma and I discussed our plans with thoroughness and care. We agreed that we would not allow any one man to monopolize her—at least not for any continued length of time.

"If old—falls in love with you," I said, "and wants you all to himself he will set you up in a fine establishment, pay all the bills and give you a piece of jewelry now and then."

"And there won't be much real money for dear Count

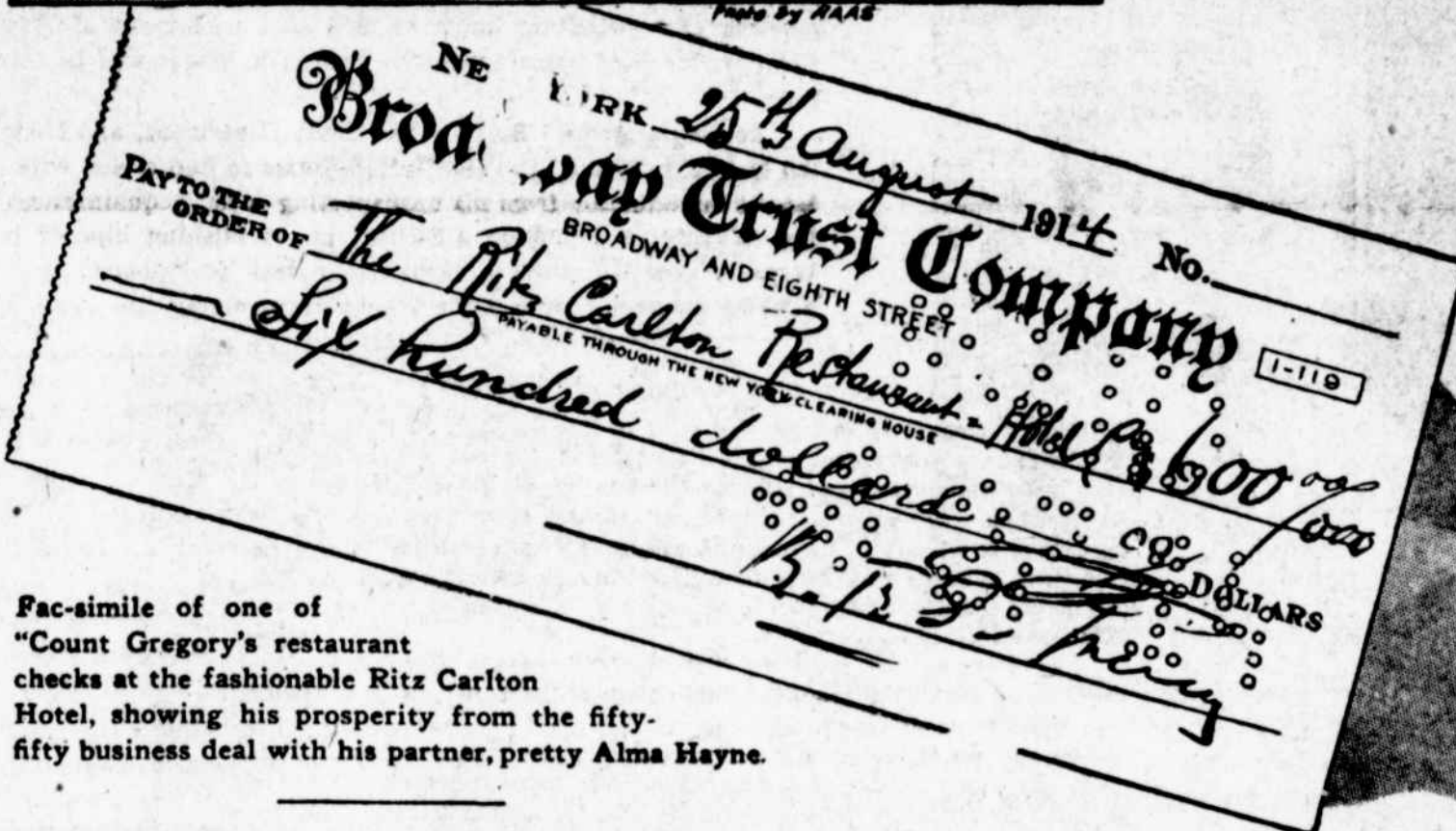
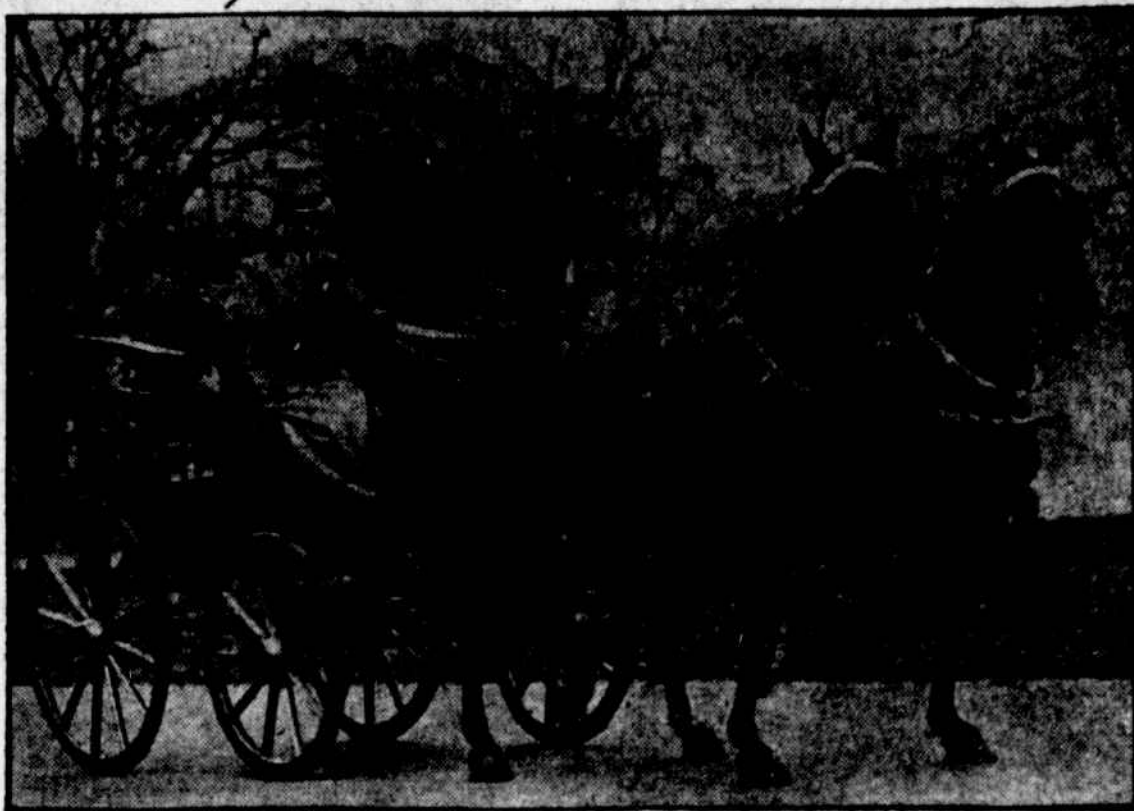
with women of the world, and none was known as an easy victim of feminine wiles.

Reginald Vanderbilt was known as a "cold" proposition. He had few women, in one sense of the word. Sam Wilson was a friend of every pretty woman, captivated by none. Atkinson enjoyed feminine companionship, but only for the passing amusement of it. Mathews was a stickler for dignity—one could not imagine him losing his head over anything. Yet to be known as a friend of any one of these men was just the open sesame I wished for my protegee.

I had stationed Alma in another part of the track club house. When the party gathered I suggested to the gentlemen that I present them to my charming friend, "the young Mrs. Hayne, who is, you know, really a Hapsburg princess." The idea was irrefragably claimed. In a moment Mrs. Hayne joined my guests and at once became the life of the party.

I had instructed her to make a striking impression. She exerted all her skill. She had practised constantly for weeks

"Count Gregory" in Central Park driving a team of his fancy horses with groom.



Fac-simile of one of "Count Gregory's" restaurant checks at the fashionable Ritz Carlton Hotel, showing his prosperity from the fifty-fifty business deal with his partner, pretty Alma Hayne.

Gregory," interrupted Alma with her quick perception.

"Your Highness displays the true keenness of mind of a Hapsburg."

"Well, then, my noble Count Gregory, you advise me to—distribute my—er—royal favors to several? To be—well—rather promiscuous?"

"Not exactly," I replied. "I would suggest avoiding the mistake of becoming the exclusive possession of one individual for very long. Jewels are delightful and fascinating; but not so satisfactory as checks. When an admirer feels that he possesses you and is cheerfully paying your bills he cannot understand why you should still desire money."

"Well, then—?" Alma queried. "But if you are maintaining your own establishment, why, then, of course, your worshipful knights will gladly contribute liberal checks for your comfort as well as the expected jewels."

"I understand perfectly," said the "Princess" with interest, "and the more contributors to my 'comforts' the more money as well as jewels to divide with you."

"Exactly, your Highness."

"Well, that is entirely agreeable to me. But how many golden balls can I juggle in the air without a disaster?" she said thoughtfully.

"There is where I shall expect to guide and safeguard you. I shall select your devotees with care—elderly men of family and position who cannot afford a scandal."

"But not too old!" Alma exclaimed with a gentle tone of misgiving.

"You shall never have cause to challenge my discretion and good judgment. But there is one thing you must pledge me."

"What?" she asked quickly.

"Not to permit yourself to become attached to any of your admirers."

chapel will fall in love with you and insist on marrying you."

"Have no fears, Count Gregory. My heart is burglar-proof. We are partners. If I stupidly fall in love and marry some worthy worshipper and become respectable—it breaks up our partnership and destroys our business. No, no! Believe me, my dear Count Gregory, I am too clever to do such a silly thing."

Mrs. Hayne meant every word she said in all sincerity—and yet she finally did exactly that very thing, and it brought an end to our prosperous partnership.

This unfortunate but real love affair of Alma's was a great blow to me, and I will give the details of it later on in its proper place. Let me now return to the situation as it stood at the time of our little business conference as I have just related it.

I now began to look around for the man, necessarily rich and generous, who was to supply Alma with the fortune I expected her to win. I knew many such men, but I wished to pick my victim very carefully. I wanted one who would not create a fuss when the inevitable happened—and he became supplanted. I wanted one, too, who would not be in a position to stand disclosure.

After a study of the Social Register and a book which lists all the rich directors of great corporations I selected a man who, I knew, had a penchant for pretty women. He was the president of a bank; was reputed to be worth fifty millions of dollars; was married to a housewifely sort of woman, who attempted merely to hold her own in society; and his station in the financial world was such that he never could afford a scandal. All New York would know his name should I care to mention it. Suppose, however, we call him Hardy, which certainly was not his real name.

Mr. Hardy lunched every day at a regular hour at the Beaux Arts restaurant, one of the garish places in the theatrical district. He occupied the same table every day, and each day brought with him to the restaurant an Airedale dog, which was his especial pet and which accompanied him to his office daily. This dog he left in the



"With a gay little laugh and a sly glance Alma nodded her acquiescence. In a moment the portly banker was sitting at her table, his hand reaching nervously for the one she kept just avoiding him. They discussed me, of course. She was charmed by his attention. She chided him for his unconventional mode of approach."

restaurant ante-room, in the care of the hat boy, while he ate his lunch.

I knew Mr. Hardy quite well. I managed to be invited to lunch with him one day. While we sat over our coffee Mrs. Hayne, by prearrangement, came in and sat at a table quite near. I excused myself and went over to speak to her. After a few words I returned to Mr. Hardy's table. He asked me at once, as I knew he would, who the charming young woman might be. When I had explained he commented upon her beauty and asked a few more questions—then changed the subject. I noticed, however, that his eyes wandered in her direction occasionally.

Every day after that Mrs. Hayne lunched at the Beaux Arts at the same hour, and at the same table. Always just across the open space that divides the tables was Mr. Hardy, the banker. Each day his glances in her direction grew more persistent—aided by her habit of giving him a sweeping glance, half of recognition, as if remembering having noticed him on the first day when I left him to speak to her.

She never allowed her eyes to linger on his, however, never gave him the slightest excuse for recognizing her. Once or twice she left her table just as Mr. Hardy began to pay his check, and a moment later was caught by him in the act of petting his Airedale waiting in the ante-room. On these occasions she blushed and retired quickly at his approach.

After a week or so of this preliminary skirmishing I